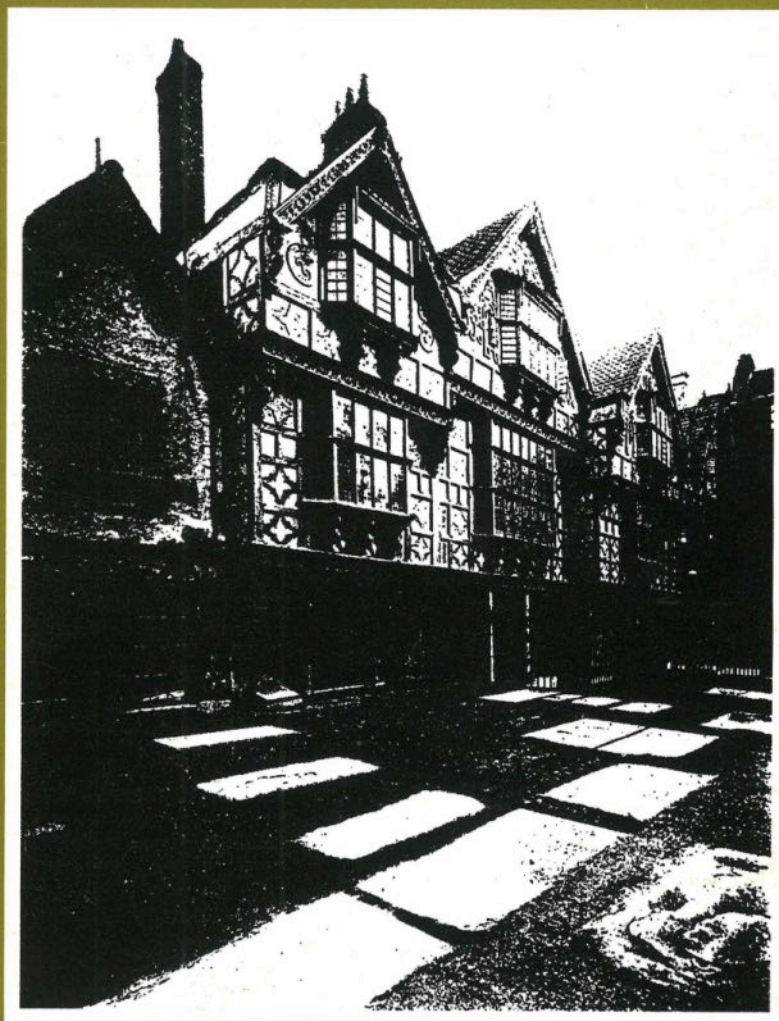


BRISTOL AND THE NEW POOR LAW



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Bristol and the New Poor Law is the eighty sixth pamphlet in the Local History series published by the Bristol Branch of the Historical Association.

It seeks to explore a topic which has been neglected for good reason. The bulk of the records of two out of the three Poor Law Unions catering for Bristol's poor were destroyed in November 1940 when St Peter's Hospital, where they were stored, became a casualty of German bombing. Nonetheless it is possible to reconstruct at least the main outlines of the implementation in Bristol and district of poor relief. The author, formerly Senior Lecturer in the Department of History, University of Bristol, has attempted to make considerable use of Parliamentary Papers, the local press and such materials as survive in the Bristol and Somerset Record Offices. He wishes to express his appreciation of the permission given to him to publish such material.

The publication of a pamphlet by the Bristol Branch of the Historical Association does not necessarily imply the Branch's approval of the opinions expressed in it.

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Cover Illustration: St Peter's Hospital from C.H. Horton's *Photographs of Bristol Antiquities* (1908) by courtesy of Bristol Central Library

BRISTOL AND THE NEW POOR LAW

After half a century of controversy and a path-breaking Royal Commission of investigation the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 inaugurated the administrative machinery and principles which governed the public provision throughout the Victorian age of assistance for those such as the unemployed, the sick, the mentally ill, the handicapped, orphans and widows who lacked the means to support themselves. At the heart of this new Poor Law was the well-regulated workhouse. It was supposed to care for those too infirm or sick to be able to work while driving those able to do so to seek employment and provide for themselves and their families without help from the parish either in cash or kind. To achieve this last end the workhouse was to be made wholly unattractive by expecting able-bodied inmates to endure long hours of monotonous labour such as stone breaking for very little pay and to obey a plethora of rules of a disciplinary nature somewhat akin to those in a prison. The notion was to deter the able-bodied from seeking relief and hence reduce the burden on the ratepayer.

Very little has been written about this new Poor Law in Bristol. By some it has been assumed, incorrectly, that the 1834 Act did not affect the city's arrangements for caring for the destitute in the shape of its Incorporation of the Poor established by statute in 1696.¹ But no doubt the main reason is that the bulk of the records of the poor law authorities perished when St Peter's Hospital where they were kept was destroyed in an air raid on 24 November 1940. Nevertheless it is possible to reconstruct part of the story by reference to the city's press which often but not invariably reported meetings of the Poor Law Guardians and Governors of the Corporation of the Poor, from time to time printed human interest items about the poor and was not slow to voice opinions about policy. Papers submitted to Parliament and a certain amount of documentation in central and local government records also provide assistance. What follows does not pretend to be comprehensive but more of an exploratory introduction.

It is a story that very much concerns 'the lower order' of Bristol's population to use the words of Dr Davies the eminent first MOH of the city.² But it is also a story illustrating the opinions and values among the well-to-do who at least until the beginning of the twentieth century dominated the local administration of the new Poor Law. Lastly it is a history which has bequeathed both physical monuments such as parts of Farleigh, Southmead and Blackberry Hill Hospitals and sentiments which often crop up in contemporary discussion of the twentieth century welfare state.

As Emily Butcher showed in a previous pamphlet in this series³ Bristol had its own poor relief system based on administrative principles similar to those introduced by the 1834 Act in that its Corporation of the Poor was a central body collecting rates and ministering to the poor in a union, in effect, of the eighteen parishes and the non-parochial district of the Castle precincts which comprised Bristol. The coming of the new system based on superseding individual parish-run relief by linking parishes together in a Union to be run by a central Board of Guardians did not lead to the abolition of the Corporation of the Poor. Not only were its management arrangements in principle but not in detail compatible with the new system but Thomas Manchee, its Deputy Governor and chief executive officer, claimed that under his direction the Corporation had been applying a key feature of the new Poor Law before that law had been thought of. Manchee said that as soon as he took office he had required 'a number of prostitutes working at a lace shop in Castle Street by day ... and on the *pavé* at night to either go into the house at Stapleton or refusing this to be discharged' i.e. denied relief. So successful was the tactic of offering the workhouse or, if refused, no relief that Manchee applied it extensively. The workhouse test, he claimed, 'was rejected by upwards of two thousand who must have found means of maintaining themselves independently of parochial aid; and thousands, perhaps, were restrained from applying knowing that they would be met by the offer of the home'. To make the test efficient Manchee boasted that he had provided workshops for the women and a room for the men to pick oakum when it was too wet for them to be outside stone breaking. The upshot was just what the proponents of the new law hoped for and confidently predicted, a fall of over 20% in one year in the cost to the ratepayer of poor relief.⁴

In addition the Corporation of the Poor attracted praise from the investigators employed by the reforming Royal Commission for seeking to avoid cash doles to destitutes as happened extensively in the parishes of St Philip and Jacob Without and Bedminster, both outside the Corporation of the Poor's jurisdiction, and instead 'systematically finding

work for them at wages below those of ordinary labour'. Also the Corporation of the Poor's record of recovering more than 50% of the cost of maintaining illegitimate or deserted children from their putative fathers was compared favourably with that of neighbouring rural parishes. Of course there were criticisms, notably of the care of the destitute mentally ill, of which more later, and of the heavy expenditure on shipping Irish 'vagrants' back to their native land at 8/- per head per passage when in reality many of them had the means to pay from their earnings from helping to bring in the English harvest.⁵ All told, its members thought, there was no substantial reason why the reformers of the old Poor Law should wish to disturb the Corporation of the Poor.

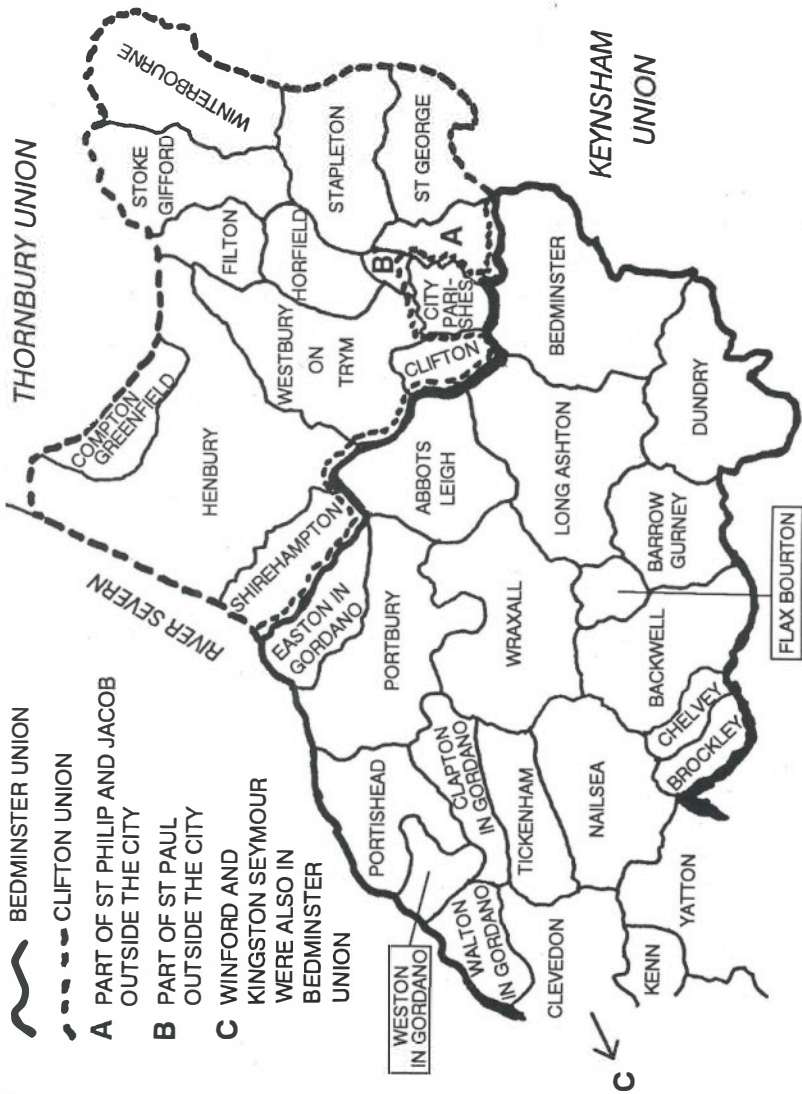
Nevertheless almost immediately complications arose. Municipal Corporation reform in 1835 not only gave Bristol an elected Council for the first time but redefined Bristol itself by extending its boundaries to include what contemporaries regarded as its suburbs consisting of the parishes of St Philip and Jacob Without and Clifton, the united district of St James and St Paul and parts of the parishes of Bedminster and Westbury-on-Trym. Was the Corporation of the Poor to minister to the poor of these suburbs? That was answered in 1836 by no less a figure than the Attorney-General who ruled that it should not.⁶ This was a prime example of a decision no doubt agreeable to lawyers but with grievous adverse consequences for those who had to carry it out. The new Unions embracing the suburbs and the Corporation of the Poor were to be endlessly plagued with having to decide whose responsibility it was to relieve this or that applicant as it was not until 1898 that the whole city became one Union and these settlement problems were eased. So what was to be done about the poor in the suburbs now merged in the city? Districts previously in Gloucestershire which included all the above named suburbs except Bedminster were to be the charge of a new body, the Guardians of the Clifton Poor Law Union, while the part of Bedminster now in the city but previously in Somerset was to come under another new body, the Guardians of Bedminster Poor Law Union. These two Unions yoked together essentially urban or semi-urbanized parishes with a clutch of rural parishes and, in the case of Clifton Union, linked well-to-do Clifton itself with the much poorer St Philip and Jacob Without.⁷ Within these Unions of Clifton and Bedminster those districts incorporated in 1835 in the city and county of Bristol were of major importance. In the Clifton Union these districts according to the census of 1831 constituted rather over half its total population of 51,345 and were represented by 15 of its 32 Guardians.⁸ The parish of Bedminster likewise was responsible for just over half the costs of the indoor poor in that Union while the medical officer for Bedminster was paid double

that of his fellows serving the other sixteen entirely rural parishes of the Union, reflecting no doubt the extra work in a parish containing many thousand urban dwellers.⁹ In brief the student of poor relief in Bristol following boundary revision is faced with three authorities, the Incorporation of the Poor (from 1898 to be known as the Bristol Guardians), the Guardians of Clifton Union (from 1877 to be renamed Barton Regis Union) and the Bedminster Guardians (to be renamed Long Ashton Guardians in 1899) each being responsible for providing accommodation for the 'indoor poor' and relief in cash or foodstuffs for the 'outdoor poor' living in their own dwellings.

The Corporation of the Poor already had its own provision for the indoor poor in the form of St Peter's Hospital with additional rented accommodation at the old French war prisoners establishment on Blackberry Hill, Stapleton.¹⁰ St Peter's was given a favourable report to the Royal Commission by Captain Chapman. He spoke of it as being 'extremely well regulated; the sexes are kept separate and the house steward is empowered to confine offenders in cases of flagrant misconduct. Vagrants are kept separate from the regular inmates. Prostitutes wear a yellow dress and single pregnant women wear a red dress; they are kept separate from the rest and are not allowed to associate with the children. The children are taught to read, to knit and to sew and when of sufficient age are sent to service. They are well clad, decent in appearance and respectful.' Able-bodied men, he reported, were employed from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. 'breaking stones at the Clifton Hot Well ... with the general idea to insist on early hours and attendance during the full hours so that the pauper went back fatigued and exhausted.' For this labour a single man was paid 3s 4d a week which was about half the wage of a Dorset farm worker who was the worst paid farm worker in the country. Women and infirm men were put to work in workshops in the city specially hired for the purpose where they made laces, plaited straw, knitted and wound worsted. In short Captain Chapman saw St Peter's as a place of discipline not a boarding house or alms-house as he described the poorhouses of St George and St Philip and Jacob Without, run by 'a very able, intelligent Master' and conscientious Governors whose accounts were 'admirably kept'.¹¹

But the two new Unions had to decide what they would do about their indoor poor. Bedminster was first off the mark settling for building a brand new 'bastille', as critics called the new workhouses, rather than using such parish poorhouses as existed. The Guardians contracted with John Badley, a Bedminster builder, to build a workhouse to the designs of George Gilbert Scott and William Bonython Moffatt. It was to cost £4,150 and to be completed by 1 September 1838 and to be sited in

THE NEW POOR LAW UNIONS AND THEIR CONSTITUENT PARISHES



Adapted by courtesy from Bristol Record Office's sketch map of South Gloucestershire and North Somerset Parishes

Long Ashton parish. The result still exists in the form of part of Farleigh Hospital which has ended its career first as a workhouse and then as hospital for those with learning difficulties and is, at the time of writing, for sale. Bedminster workhouse was among the earliest, perhaps even the first, of the over fifty workhouses attributed to Sir Gilbert Scott who at this time was in his early twenties just embarking on one of the most productive careers of any nineteenth century architect.¹²

Whereas Bedminster figured in the first list in 1840 of 252 Unions providing adequate workhouses in the eyes of the central government's Poor Law Commission, Clifton was one of the 175 Unions still using old poorhouses.¹³ According to Rev. Henry Bishop reporting to the Royal Commission, the select vestry which governed Clifton parish itself did not have one. Indeed he was highly critical of its administration: 'people flock into this parish because it has the character of being a good one; in other words it is known that there is a great deal of money very indiscriminately given'. Consequently little or no reduction in the rates had been achieved, a major fault in the eyes of proponents of the new Poor Law.¹⁴ Other parishes in the Clifton Union did have poorhouses, notably St Philip and Jacob Without. Captain Chapman reported that in 1831-2 it averaged 75 residents for whom little or no employment was found. It was more a boarding house than a workhouse. The parish authorities were struggling. The population of 15,755 was 'almost entirely of the working classes' who were prone to be thrown out of work. The parish was a thousand pounds in debt as a consequence of an inability to collect the poor-rate. There were '1,500 houses let at about 2s 6d a week none of which pay poor-rates.' Those who did paid an excessively high rate. Relief not exceeding 2s 6d per head per week and in most cases not above 1s was given almost without inquiry.¹⁵ The 1834 reform did not mean that poor parishes like this were aided by much richer districts such as Clifton. That would only happen following the Union Chargeability Act of 1865 which made the whole Union rather than each separate parish bear the cost of relief.

Eventually in 1847 Clifton Union did build a new workhouse to supersede the St Philip and Jacob Without poorhouse in Pennywell Road, the St George poorhouse which Captain Chapman had described as 'clean and in good order' and a poorhouse in Clifton Wood which Clifton had set up subsequent to Rev. Henry Bishop's enquiries.¹⁶ The Clifton Guardians, unlike those of Bedminster, did not opt at once for a new workhouse to cater for all kinds of paupers. By the advice of Assistant Commissioner Weale in 1838 they had sought to implement the new law by having separate institutions for the various categories of their poor. Clifton Wood was to be for the aged, feeble and sick - the hospital

of the Union - St George was for children up to the age of fifteen and Pennywell Road for 'robust and working paupers' was to be the test house of the Union. In this way it would seem the general mixed workhouse would be avoided and at least an approximation to some of the more idealistic sentiments of catering for the specific needs of particular classes of the poor in the report of the Royal Commission would be upheld. But that was not to be. Three reasons were adduced by the Guardians for creating a large new Union workhouse to house all kinds of poor folk. Firstly the number of paupers was increasing to such an extent as to overwhelm the existing poorhouses. In the first year of the Union it had catered for 406 indoor poor but from 1842-1844 the number had been steady at just over 800. Secondly the Pennywell Road establishment, the Guardians admitted, was a disgrace. Daniel Burgess, vestry clerk of Clifton (who was also Town Clerk of Bristol) read out extracts from the visiting books showing that 'the insane, sick and able-bodied were all in the same ward', that it was severely overcrowded, had no infirmary ward and no room exclusively for tramps. One of the Guardians spoke of having found a woman there with a bastard lying dead and 'itched paupers' in no way separated from other inmates. Lastly, and perhaps decisively, the chairman of the Guardians, the Rev. William Mirehouse observed that managing the poor in one general Union workhouse would be cheaper than in the three existing houses. The cost in one institution would be £2,148 19s 9d per year while the present cost in three houses was £2,682 19s 3d.

The ratepayers of Clifton nonetheless took some persuading. Indeed at a crowded vestry meeting in October 1844 presided over by W.H. Gore-Langton of Clifton Court, the senior church-warden and later Mayor and M.P. for Bristol, a resolution urging the abandonment of the scheme for a new workhouse was carried overwhelmingly. At the same time it was agreed to memorialize the Poor Law Commission to make Clifton a separate Union. It was in vain that Guardians had argued that Clifton would probably only have to find £4,000 as its share of the capital cost of the new workhouse which when borrowed over a period of twenty years would add about £205 a year to Clifton's poor-rates. This would be three farthings in the pound on the rates which would be reduced to three-eighths of a penny when account was taken of the reduced running costs of the new institution. The truth was, as a number of speakers made clear, Clifton ratepayers did not see why they should have any responsibility for the poor of St Philip and Jacob and their wretched poorhouse. They would have been more incensed if they had known that the calculations just mentioned had been based on a capital cost for the new project of £16,000 including land purchase while in fact

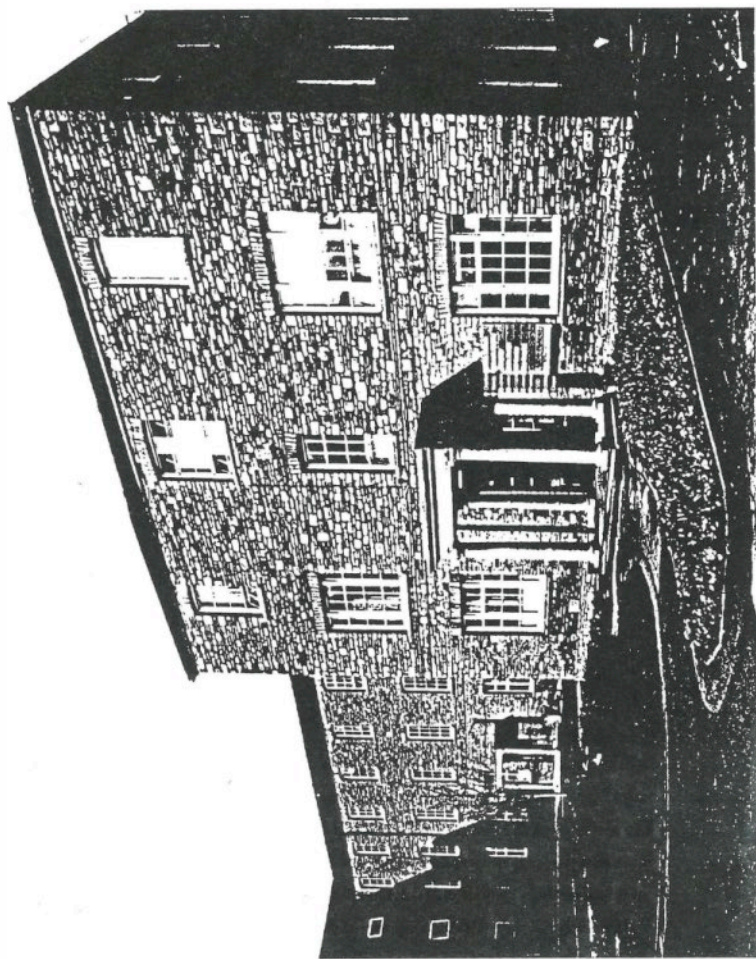
the Clifton Guardians had negotiated with the Poor Law Commission on a basis of borrowing £20,000 and within a year of opening the new Eastville house at 100 Fishponds Road they had secured permission to borrow another £5,000 for further building.¹⁷

While the Clifton Guardians were moving towards establishing a Union workhouse, the Poor Law Commission was opening its campaign to bring Local Act Unions like that of Bristol under its control. If the Commission was ever to achieve even an approximation to uniformity throughout the country in the administration of the Poor Law it seemed to it essential that it should exert such control, since it calculated that a population of 1,282,652 was ministered to by 32 Local Act Unions not under the Poor Law Amendment Act. One of the Commission's earliest moves was to ask its inspectorial eyes and ears, the Assistant Commissioners, to report on the Local Act Unions. Assistant Commissioner Robert Weale reported on Bristol in 1842 and provides us with an invaluable insight into the affairs of the Corporation of the Poor. By this time Stapleton had become the recipient of the bulk of the indoor poor and was described by Weale as 'in the nature of an ordinary workhouse' while St Peter's was virtually truly a hospital being used for the sick of both sexes, lying-in women, accident cases, lunatics of both sexes, and the only residents who were not ill were a few aged and infirm folk and vagrants turning up in a state of great destitution. At Stapleton a new and large building for males had just been erected and a chapel. The workhouse could now hold seven hundred. Weale thought both establishments were clean and orderly and he enclosed an informative list of those actually running them. This involved use of the much lauded early Victorian virtue of self-help. At St Peter's 71 paupers were paid a shilling or sixpence a week to work in twenty-two different capacities ranging from undertaker to head nurse of the male lunatic ward and window cleaner to ostler. The first two were exceptional in being paid two shillings a week. At Stapleton 77 paupers were similarly employed on a narrower range of jobs. But in addition there was a body of salaried officers headed by Josias Downing, the Master of St Peter's, to whom the Matron, House Steward, Schoolmaster and Schoolmistress, i.e. the officers at Stapleton, were subordinate. By the standards of the time the Master with a salary of £250 a year was well paid.¹⁸ But as Weale noted he was more akin to the Clerk of a Board of Guardians than a workhouse master, that role being played at St Peter's by the House Steward who was only paid £150, although this was munificent compared with the £85 which was all that John and Elizabeth Cotsell, Steward and Matron at Stapleton, received. Weale's report besides retailing evidence from Josias Downing about the management of the

outdoor poor, which will be referred to later, contains some most useful statistics relating to the numbers of paupers and expenditure upon them in each of the ten years 1832 to 1842. Key developments in these ten years were the just over doubling of the average weekly number of indoor paupers from 464 in 1832-3 to 1,022 in 1842, the substantial fall in the number of outdoor poor (including an assumed average number of individuals in a family to be three) from the average weekly number in 1832-3 of 7,203 to 4,227 in 1842 and a sharp fall in expenditure down to 1839 followed by a rise probably to be accounted for by the downturn of the business cycle leading to an increase in unemployment. Almost certainly these last two developments were the result of Manchee's efforts referred to earlier.

Finally in his report Weale printed a set of rules drawn up by Deputy Governor Morgan in 1836 prescribing the dietary and discipline to be observed in the workhouse and some notes on the education of pauper children at Stapleton. Diets were monotonous and limited in the extreme. For instance, boys and girls aged 6 to 16 were to have 14½ ounces of bread, 8 ounces of potatoes, 1½ ounces of cheese and a pint of gruel each day, supplemented once a week by a pint of rice and four times a week by 3 ounces of meat. Punishment for adults included stopping wages, no meat or beer, no leaving the house, and solitary confinement not exceeding 24 hours. The flavour of a prison was not far away. The schoolmaster told Weale that he had no less than 128 boys to teach. Amazingly he had been doing this for the past sixteen years. Of course he concentrated on the three Rs using the SPCK books and the British and Foreign School Society cards but all boys were taught to make and mend their own clothing, repair their shoes and all household work 'such as cleaning knives, washing floors and making their beds'. He said that he gave them oral instruction in geography and general subjects as well as inculcating the Anglican catechism. All these rules and practices Weale pointed out had not been sanctioned by the management committee of the Incorporation of the Poor let alone by the Poor Law Commission which was increasingly sure that it had the courts on its side when it sought to assert its authority over Local Act Unions like Bristol.¹⁹

The new workhouses at Farleigh, Stapleton and Eastville and many others that sprang up in the early Victorian age were striking symbols of the new Poor Law. Novel, large and formidable in appearance by comparison with most parish poorhouses and emerging often with remarkable rapidity they were bound to have a powerful impact upon local populations, although there is no evidence of active hostility to the new law in Bristol as was the case in other parts of the country notably



Main Building, detail of Central Block, Stapleton Workhouse. By courtesy of the National Monuments Record

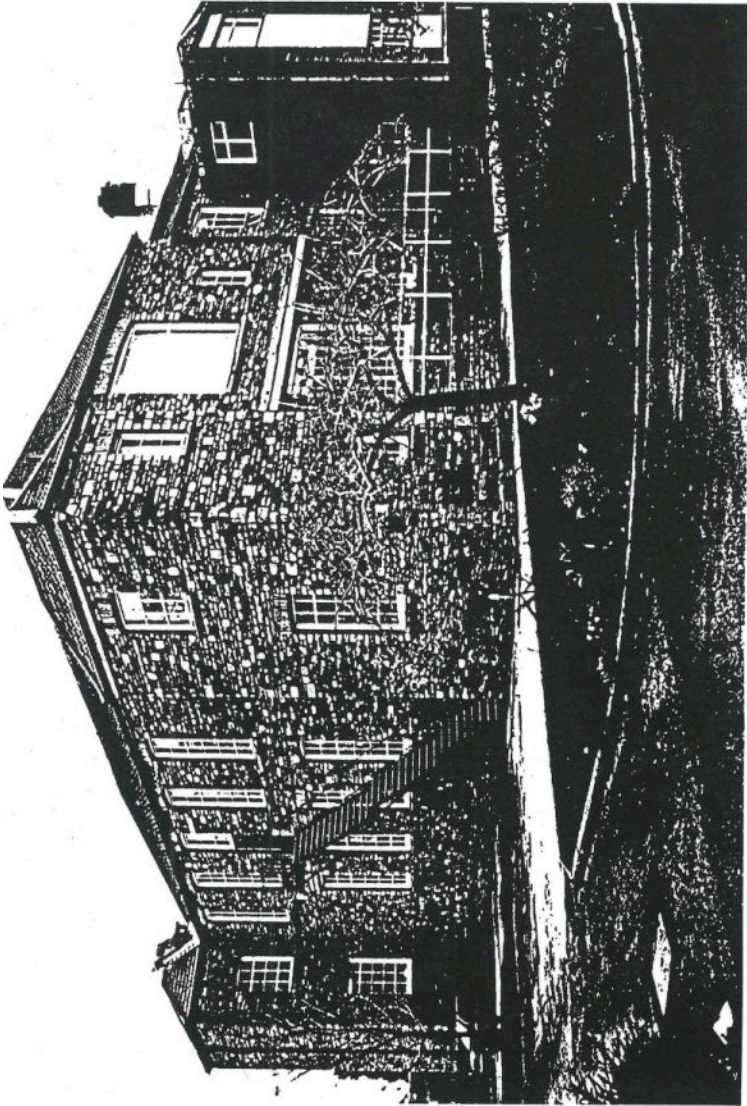
in northern England. In the eyes of the creators of the new law the workhouse was invested with immense and often contradictory tasks. In the words of a recent commentator 'it should simultaneously relieve the helpless, deter the idle, set children on the right path, encourage thrift and temperance, reduce crime ... raise wages and heal the growing division in the social order'.²⁰ Needless to say it could scarcely be expected to succeed in all these assignments. Only too often the reality was a promiscuous barrack, the so-called general mixed workhouse, in which a monotonous soul-destroying routine and often severe discipline was enforced.²¹

Poor Law reform also meant establishing what had hitherto been unknown, a central government authority²² charged with implementing and regulating the new Poor Law throughout England and Wales. It was this authority that was to curtail sharply the independence of Bristol's Corporation of the Poor although this did not happen until the 1850s. Over the years the central authority issued a stream of orders and circulars which local Poor Law Guardians were expected to implement. Bristol's Corporation of the Poor was long accustomed to making its own decisions and drawing up its own rules. Not surprisingly it found itself in conflict with the central authority particularly when it insisted that Local Act Unions should submit their accounts to the newfangled District Auditors.²³ After this and other clashes the climax was reached in 1856 when the Poor Law Board rejected new bylaws drawn up by the management committee of the Corporation of the Poor and maintained that it should obey the Board's rules in regard to the appointment of a clerk, paid medical officers and relieving officers as well as keeping to the dietary for the workhouse prescribed by the Board. At meetings of the Corporation protest was made at the uncompromising attitude of the Board. But it was in vain. As that rising young man Elisha Robinson pointed out, counsel's opinion was that the Poor Law Board had the power to compel obedience to its orders. As he noted 'the difference between an ordinary Board of Guardians and the Corporation of the Poor was that in addition to being Guardians charged with the management, care, maintenance and relief of the poor the Corporation were also overseers and had the making and collection of the rates. It was in their capacity as Guardians that they came under the orders of the Poor Law Board and had to obey it'. It would not be until 1898 that the Corporation of the Poor would relinquish making and collecting rates when the City Council at last took this over. The Poor Law Board's victory over the Corporation of the Poor in 1856 was seen at the time as a turning point. The *Bristol Mercury* regarded the Corporation as no longer existing as an independent body. It had become on a par with the

Clifton or Bedminster Guardians.²⁴ There were repercussions. Reducing the rations at Stapleton workhouse to comply with the Poor Law Board's orders caused a riot in April 1857. The women refused to eat their Sunday dinner and ran amok in the chapel creating an uproar and smashing several windows.²⁵

Slowly some inmates of the workhouse came to be cared for outside it. Among the earliest in Bristol were the mentally ill, those whom contemporaries called pauper lunatics. By a local Act of 1822 two wards in St Peter's Hospital had been designated the lunatic asylum for the parishes of the pre-1835 city and their inmates had been cared for by the Corporation of the Poor alongside the rest of the pauper residents of the hospital. But in 1845 county justices - and Bristol after all was a county with its own justices - were required by a new statute to provide what had hitherto been optional, expensive lunatic asylums with extensive grounds. As Mr Ward, Clerk to the Incorporation of the Poor explained to Mr Goldney, one of its members, there was no option but to transfer responsibility for the pauper lunatics in St Peter's to the city and county's justices. It was an onerous responsibility. Lord Shaftesbury's Lunacy Commissioners on inspection trips to St Peter's found much to complain about. It lacked open space, overcrowding was a constant threat, proper classification of patients was impossible and treatment tailored to individual need was not given. By 1849 the Home Secretary was ordering that a new building should be provided. Knowing that this would involve the city in very heavy capital expenditure the Justices protested vigorously. Their Clerk pointed out that suggestions for improvement at St Peter's had been carried out, the cure rate there bore comparison with the best asylums in the country and the St Peter's site was not as unhealthy as was alleged. There had been no fatality from cholera there during the recent epidemic while rural Stapleton had been badly hit. Finally the Clerk observed that Bristol was never less able than at present to bear the cost of a new asylum: it had yet to reap an expected benefit from the City Council taking over the Docks, heavy expenditure had been incurred in widening streets, forming new sewers, providing baths and wash-houses, rebuilding the Guild Hall and further untold expenditure was to be expected since the Council contemplated adopting the recent Public Health Act. It was a powerful case.

The Home Secretary retreated. But Palmerston, in his unfamiliar role in this office, in 1853 revived the Order for a new Asylum. By this time it was clear that St Peter's was quite unable to find enough room for the mentally sick. Their number had grown because the Justices of Somerset and Gloucestershire had decided that such patients - some forty in all - who dwelt in districts such as Bedminster and Clifton, now incorporated



Male Infirmary, Stapleton Workhouse. By courtesy of the National Monuments Record

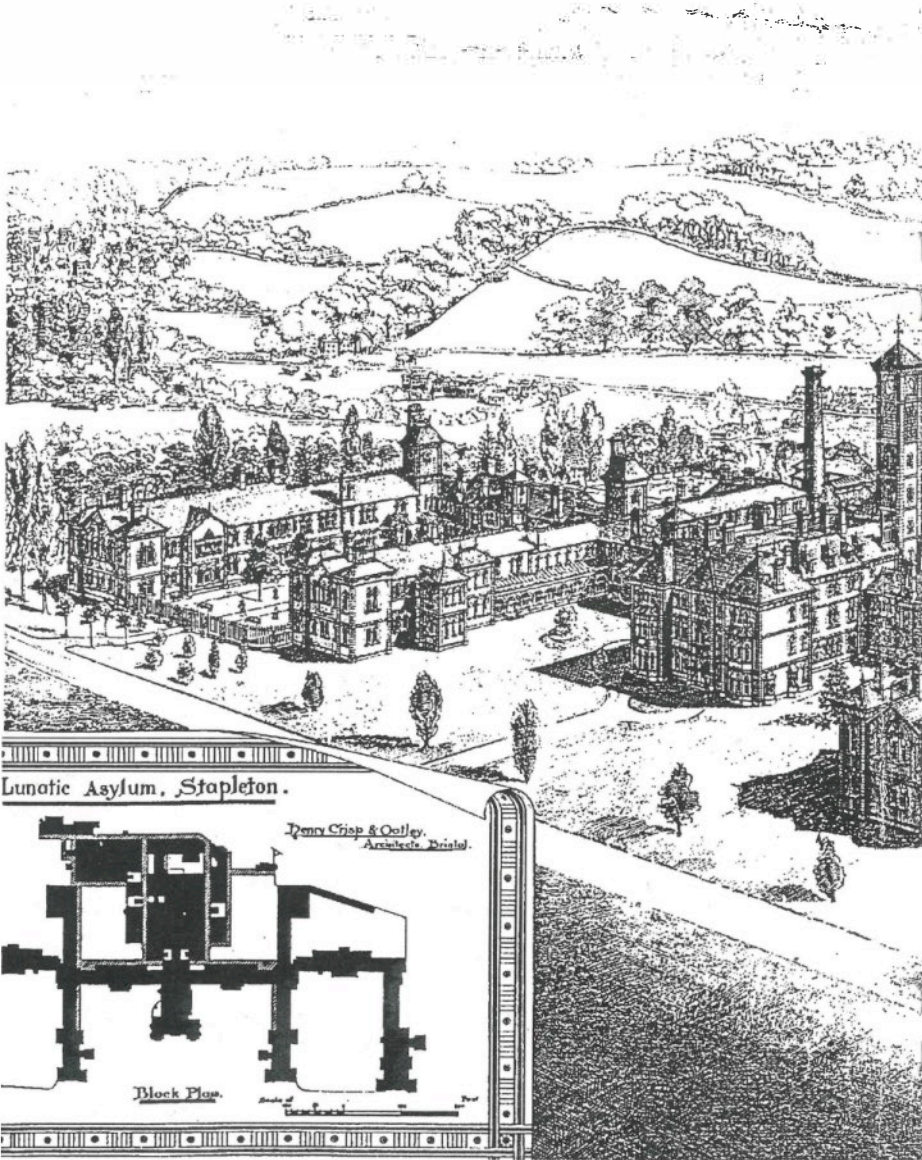
in the city and county of Bristol should not be cared for in their county asylums at Wells and Coney Hill, then just outside Gloucester, but should be looked after by the Bristol Justices at St Peter's. But as the Clifton Guardians informed the Home Office this was impracticable hence Palmerston's Order. The Bristol Justices had no option but to accept that St Peter's was no longer viable as an asylum for mentally ill paupers. They realised too that they were a most unsuitable body to take on raising the very large sum needed for a new asylum. In 1854 they urged the City Council to take over their duties and powers as statute law permitted. This was done but not before the Justices had suggested a way to cut the cost of providing for the mentally sick. Why not adapt part of the Stapleton workhouse for them? The City Council tried hard to sell this notion to central government but without success. The Lunacy Commissioners imbued with what was then the progressive idea that the best cure for mental illness was care in a purpose-built asylum carried the day. By 1856 the City Council was setting in motion the process to build what contemporaries called the Bristol Lunatic Asylum but which came to be known to many later generations of Bristolians as Glenside, in essence the lunatic asylum for the city and county of Bristol on a par with county lunatic asylums up and down the country.²⁶

While many mentally ill poor folk entered the new asylum when it opened in 1861 some still remained in the workhouse. For instance, it was the practice in Clifton Union to 'send all cases of insanity to the workhouse in the first instance instead of to the Asylum'. Both the law and the Commissioners in Lunacy condemned this practice, the Commissioners citing a case in the Clifton Union workhouse at Eastville to enforce their view. A very disturbed young woman was admitted there, proved most unruly and 'struck a blow at Mrs H, the Matron, who immediately fell down dead'.²⁷ Such too was the pressure on the limited accommodation at St Peter's that the mentally ill had found themselves in Stapleton workhouse rather than in the asylum at St Peter's. This was the fate of Eliza Canningford whose case was taken up by city councillor William Herapath who for many years took a special interest in the care of the mentally ill. Eliza had been admitted to the sick ward at Stapleton and transferred to 'the Female Imbecile Ward' where she acquired a knife and cut her throat in the toilet.²⁸ Also it was considerably more expensive to care for the mentally ill in an asylum rather than a workhouse so there was every incentive for Guardians to keep the more easily managed in the workhouse particularly when asylums, despite frequent enlargements, became crowded with long-stay patients to a degree that had not been envisaged. Indeed a useful plan of the Eastville workhouse at 100 Fishponds Road (of which no buildings now survive)

as it was in 1911, after it had been taken over in 1898 by the enlarged Bristol Union, shows that it still contained accommodation for the male and female insane.²⁹

As for the poor suffering from physical ailments, the new Poor Law was of little immediate benefit. Chadwick and Nassau Senior, the prime inspirers of the 1834 Act, regarded sanitary reform as the best route to improved public health. Hence civil engineers were more to be encouraged than doctors and given the limited weapons then at the disposal of medical practitioners there was justification for their view. Moreover their obsession with disciplining able-bodied paupers meant that they and the central authority right down to the late 1860s were reluctant to concede that a workhouse fashioned to deter the able-bodied from entering it was scarcely likely to be a caring institution for the sick, the disabled or maternity cases.³⁰ Also the drive to reduce poor-rates which accompanied the coming of the new law meant that Boards of Guardians were often reluctant to spend on medical help for the outside poor. To add to their problems, and that of the Guardians as well, the voluntary hospitals by and large expected the poor law to cope with the most intractable medical conditions. As the excellent report in 1864 on the hospitals of the U.K. by Dr J.S. Bristowe and Mr Timothy Holmes to Sir John Simon, the eminent Medical Officer to the Privy Council, explained 'the great majority of our English country hospitals exclude all fevers' and 'there is a common rule in English Hospitals ... that patients with incurable diseases shall not be admitted ... such diseases include organic affections of the heart ... advanced Bright's disease, cancerous affections and especially confirmed phthisis' (i.e. T.B., the prince of killing diseases at this time). Certainly voluntary hospitals such the Bristol Royal Infirmary treated patients, including poor folk. Indeed the 1864 report showed in a given year it cared for more patients than any of its counterparts throughout provincial England³¹ but it was the Poor Law authorities who were expected to cope with, for instance, many of the 1,500 cases of typhus in the city in this very year.³² Also many a poor person died of T.B. in the workhouses. Furthermore Poor Law doctors, usually only taking up such posts to supplement rather unrewarding private practices, enjoyed little prestige, were apt to be at the beck and call of Guardians and relieving officers, often used assistants to do their job while nursing assistance was rarely trained and, as we have seen, most often consisted of whoever was recruited among the paupers to lend a hand.³³

Perhaps not surprisingly the 1864 report did not regard sick wards in workhouses as part of the country's hospital provision at all and nor was it be wondered at that in the early decades of the new law Poor Law



The Bristol Lunatic Asylum, Stapleton: 'The Building News',

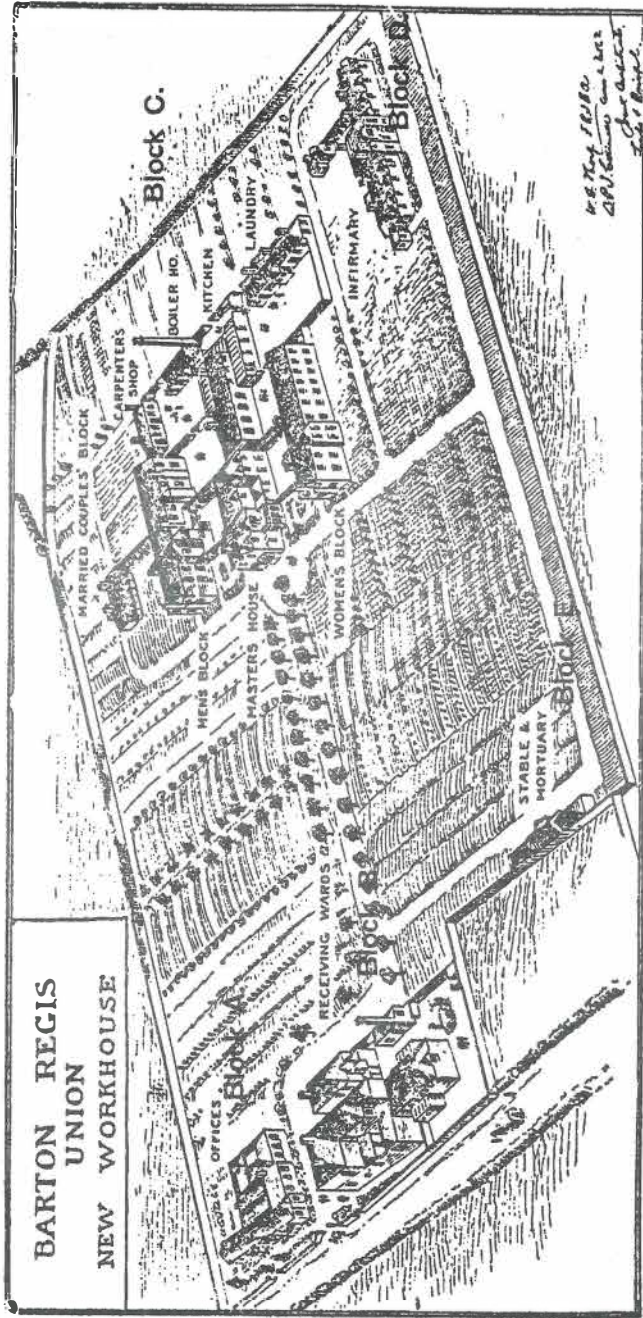


10 April 1891. By courtesy of the National Monuments Record

medical officers were ill-paid. The Bedminster Guardians in January 1838 appointed four medical officers at annual salaries ranging from £75 to £48: a month later they were faced with a petition for an increase in salaries which simply resulted in the Guardians putting up the total salary bill from £195 to £215 a year.³⁴ But it would seem that medical appointments at St Peter's Hospital which advertised itself as having three physicians, three surgeons and an apothecary to care for its sick did carry some prestige and attracted some of the better trained doctors. For instance the young William Budd recently graduated from Edinburgh and after study in London and the much renowned Paris was, it would appear, pleased to become one of its physicians in 1842. When he retired on appointment to the Bristol Royal Infirmary five years later there was a brisk contest for the vacant post with each of the two front-runners polling thirty-one votes at a meeting of the full court of management of the Corporation of the Poor leaving its Governor in a quandary as to how to use his casting vote.³⁵

Eventually the standard of care for the sick poor which had so often been abysmal began to improve a little in the later nineteenth century thanks in part to a campaign waged by women who took up visiting workhouses. In Bristol Frances Power Cobbe and her friend Miss Elliot, daughter of the Dean of Bristol, took this up regarding themselves as followers of Louisa Twining whose *Our Poor and Our Workhouses* (1862) stimulated efforts to humanise workhouse sick wards and to make the case for hospitals for the incurables now so often languishing in those wards.³⁶ In London, and later and sporadically in the provinces, sick wards in remodelled workhouses were created and, particularly in the capital and the larger cities, Poor Law infirmaries separate from the workhouse were built. Outside the capital Leeds was first in the field in 1871 followed by Liverpool in 1884 and Birmingham in 1886. Eastville workhouse eventually had a considerable infirmary on its ground floor, as the 1911 plan shows, with ten wards and a dormitory with more accommodation on the first floor for sick women and children. But the nearest approach to a separate infirmary in the Bristol area came with the opening in 1902 of the new workhouse and infirmary at Southmead by Sir John Dorrington M.P. and Chairman of Gloucestershire County Council.

Southmead has since then become so transformed into a very busy large general hospital that its poor law origins are not easy to discern. Those origins were curious and confusing. The former Clifton Union, renamed Barton Regis Union in 1877, was virtually decimated by the Act of Parliament of 1897 which enlarged Bristol by enabling it to swallow up the urban areas of both Barton Regis and Bedminster Unions and at



Barton Regis Union new workhouse at Southmead, 1902, from the brochure prepared for the opening ceremony (BRO 11169/1 The Frank Sheppard Collection)

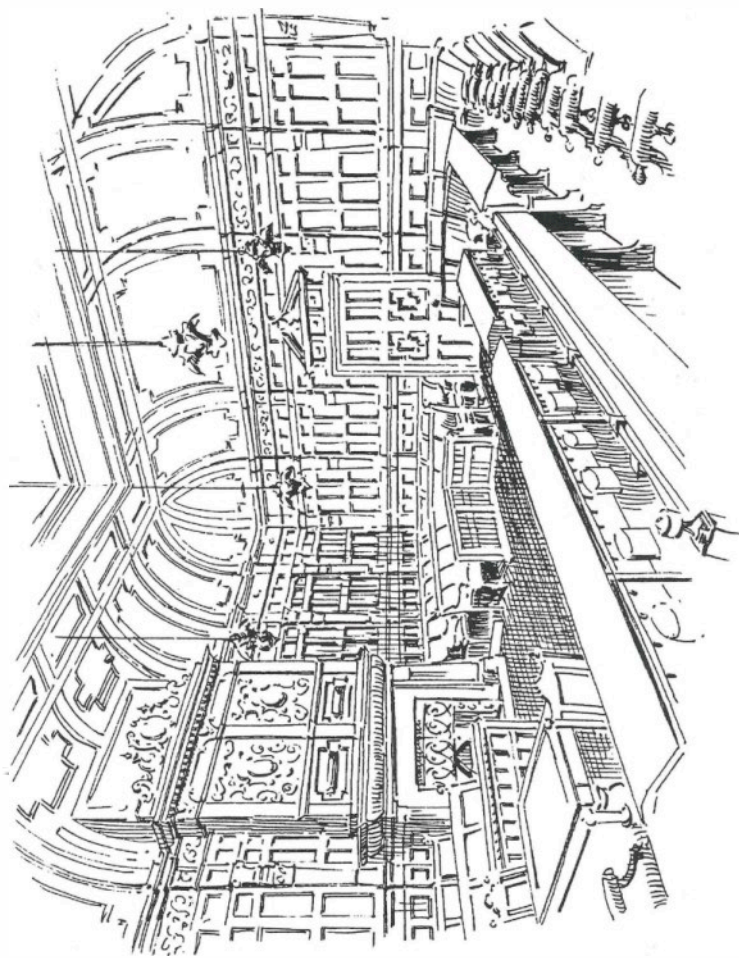
the same time allowed the creation of a single large Bristol Union. All that was left of Barton Regis was a population of about 15,000 and a rateable value of £88,210. Bristol took over its Eastville workhouse and, after an arbitration award, provided Barton Regis with about a third of the funds needed to build Southmead, for this very diminished Union was required by central Government's Local Government Board to have a new workhouse. A Poor Law Union without a workhouse was unthinkable. So Southmead emerged with its buildings designed in 'a simple type of English Renaissance' by joint architects A.P. Cotterell and W.H. Thorp of a firm with offices in Bristol and Leeds. Its novelty was that it contained a separate building designed as an infirmary with 28 beds and provision for three nurses; the rest of the buildings comprised an orthodox workhouse.³⁷

The management of the indoor poor attracted much more attention than that of the outdoor poor. There were innumerable matters arousing argument in running workhouses ranging from interminable disputes over contracts for supplying them with victuals, fuel and equipment to wrangles over the spiritual health of inmates. A characteristic row occurred in 1847 when the Rev. P. O'Farrell, a Catholic priest, complained to the Corporation of the Poor that books he had given to Catholic children at Stapleton workhouse had been confiscated. To this the Governor of the Corporation retorted 'that the house was essentially a Church of England establishment, it had a regular chaplain and the court (of the Corporation) had resolved that no books should be circulated without his sanction'. For good measure the Governor added that the confiscated books were 'more than prayer books' implying there was a proselytising purpose.³⁸

The poor being relieved in their own homes either by cash or in kind or both were much more numerous than the indoor poor. A nationwide survey in 1872 - taken before a substantial fall in the number of the outdoor poor in the following decades - showed a ratio of five outdoor poor to every one in the workhouse. Clifton Union conformed to this but Bedminster had ten times as many on outdoor relief as in the workhouse while the ratio in Bristol was three to one, being similar to many London Unions.³⁹ The architects of the new Poor Law were above all concerned about such of the outdoor poor who were able-bodied since they were convinced that large numbers of them had been living off the poor-rates in the days of the old law and thus eating up the country's wealth and in particular the rent rolls of landowners. The Poor Law Commission and its successors were determined to stamp this out; indeed in their second report in 1836 they described this as 'the main object of the Poor Law Amendment Act'. To this end Orders were issued to Guardians

prohibiting outdoor relief to the able-bodied. Initially these Orders were sent to a mere handful of Unions. Clifton was judged to be among 'some of the best managed Unions' and hence was included in the next batch of some sixty or so to receive Prohibitory Orders.⁴⁰ By 1840, with its new workhouse, Bedminster was also in receipt of such an Order.⁴¹ As a memorandum prepared by the Local Government Board for the celebrated Royal Commission on the Poor Laws that reported in 1909 shows, these Prohibitory Orders were still in force in both Unions in 1871. Their effect, as the national statistics show, was that relief to unemployed or underemployed men was all but abolished. The new Poor Law did little or nothing for them even though they constituted such a large proportion of the working population and were so vulnerable to the ups and downs of the business cycle and to structural changes in the economy.⁴²

Bristol as a Local Act Union was untouched by these Orders. Its practice in regard to outdoor relief was described to Assistant Commissioner Weale in 1842 in some detail by the Master of St Peter's. 'Applicants,' he said, 'sit in St Peter's Churchyard which is used as the entrance to the hospital and in wet weather is covered over with canvas.' They were admitted in alphabetical order to meet the committee when details of their names, occupation, address and number of children were written down in the Application Book. Then on Thursdays and Saturdays they are visited by the Visitor and Inspector of the out-poor who, if he deems it proper, administers relief and enters this in his Report Book. This is then presented to the Relief Committee at its next meeting who then decide 'upon the case by offering the house or giving out-door employment or should the parties belong to some other parish direct proper steps for their removal'. If the applicant was sick he or she was sent to the medical officer who was always present on committee days and who would recommend whether or not the applicant should be admitted to hospital and his or her dependents granted outdoor relief. If the medical officer decided that the applicant did not need hospital treatment but was unable to work he or she would get an outpatient note which had to be brought to the committee every week so that the medical officer could decide whether relief should be continued or not. Paupers too ill to attend at St Peter's were visited in their homes by the medical officer. Old persons past labour, widows with families and persons reported by the medical officers as permanently unable to work were placed on the permanent list and relieved every Wednesday and Friday by Mr Hemmons the Visitor and Inspector of the outdoor poor. That meant that they had to turn up in the Churchyard of St Peter's where the process of doling out shillings and loaves of bread took between three and four and a half hours.



St Peter's Hospital Board Room: Drawing by S. Loxton by courtesy of Bristol Central Library

The Deputy Governor dealt with tricky cases referred to him by the relief committee - that is men who refused to maintain their wives, girls with bastards and tramps. No able-bodied person was relieved outside the workhouse without requiring work from them in return for relief, the work in 1842 consisting of 'digging, wheeling, pumping and breaking gravel' at Stapleton which involved a three mile walk from St Peter's. For such work they were paid on a scale ranging from 1s 10d to 4s 1d and from three to six 4lb loaves per week depending on how many children they had to support. Old men in good health but unable to walk to Stapleton, feeble or crippled young single men and married men with young families were employed at an oakum shop on Castle Green. Old men past labour and widows were granted a shilling a week and a 4lb loaf. How they survived beggars the imagination. Finally, the Master of St Peter's gave details of a system of signs used by the officers to advise the relieving committee of the character of the applicant before them with a view to sorting out the sheep from the goats. If the officers called out or the medical officer inscribed on his note an 'E' this meant the applicant was lazy and would not work. An 'F' indicated a drunkard, an 'H' applicants able to maintain themselves, a 'G' a very troublesome character, a 'T' on the doctor's note indicated that the applicant was not ill. A more benign indication was a 'C' indicating that the applicant should come in to St Peter's to be cured.

So who were these Bristolians who were surviving somehow on outdoor relief? The Master of St Peter's supplied Weale with figures for the ten years 1833-1842 in which he divided them into four categories: casuals, permanent, bastardy and working. The permanents were much the most numerous, although in years of great distress such as 1842 the casual poor swelled substantially.⁴³ As might be expected from the destruction of records and the absence of testimony from the poor themselves it is not easy to find out much about individuals among the outdoor poor. But there does survive a record for 1850-1852 of the applicants for relief in the Bedminster Union a substantial number of whom came from that part of Bedminster which had been incorporated in Bristol in 1835. From September 30th 1850 to October 30th of the same year there were 25 applicants. A glance at some of these provides some insight into the lives of the poor. There was a widow of 30 with four children whose husband had died of cholera in the 1849 epidemic; there was Sarah Brunt aged 15 living with her brother and applying for relief because her father had turned her out of doors; there was Hannah, aged 58 and sick, whose husband had left her; there was a 34-year old labourer with a broken thigh, a wife and two children and there was James Hale, an Irish dealer, who was sick and had a wife and four

children.⁴⁴ Incidentally, despite much contemporary belief, the Irish did not figure prominently as recipients of poor relief as analysis of the 1851 census shows at a time when their needs as a result of flight from the famine-stricken mother country might be expected to be most acute.⁴⁵ More numerous among the outdoor poor were those from parishes outside Bristol, if one may judge from a surviving printed list of persons living in the very populous parish of St Michael's who were receiving outdoor relief in 1834. 109 fell into this category compared with 40 sick and casual cases, 72 permanent cases, 10 working cases, 8 desertions and 5 bastardy cases. Of the 109 almost half came from parishes over about 15 miles distant from Bristol with some bias towards migrants from Wales and the West country as might be expected. The rest came from parishes within walking distance of the city such as Hanham, Henbury, Frenchay, Kingswood Hill, Durdham Down, Easton, Pill and Keynsham. The occupations of these migrants to Bristol were often not listed but when they were almost all were unskilled labourers, charwomen, servants, practitioners of 'plainwork', 'washing' or gardening for instance. The Corporation of the Poor did try to return paupers with settlements in non-Bristol parishes. Indeed its surviving letter books contain many examples of their solicitors writing to overseers in parishes all over the country to this end.⁴⁶ As for the permanent category, two-thirds were over fifty years old and a half were widows. The only other list surviving for 1834 was for the small inner city parish of Christ Church whose outdoor poor in all categories only numbered 40 almost all of whom lived either in Fox's Court off Pithay or in Pithay itself, that is in one of those slums for which early Victorian cities were notorious.⁴⁷

Finally, consideration should be given to those who sought to implement the new Poor Law and to what was the result of their activities. At the local level, the Guardians of Clifton and Bedminster Unions, members of the Incorporation of the Poor, their officers and the particular Assistant Commissioners assigned to Somerset and Gloucestershire were those chiefly concerned. The Chairman of the Clifton Union from 1837 to 1859 was the Rev. William Mirehouse of Hambrook Grove, Perpetual Curate of the newly formed district of Fishponds from 1821 until his death in 1864 and also rector of Colsterworth in Lincolnshire, and one the larger owners of land in Hambrook. According to the Rev. David Cooper who preached his funeral sermon he was active as a magistrate, a keen supporter of the Clergy Society and a friend of the poor as evidenced by his filling 'the laborious and thankless office' of Chairman of the Board of Guardians. As might be expected little can be gleaned of Mirehouse's personality from a funeral sermon although he is said to have had many opponents

but few, if any, enemies and was chiefly interested in 'the children and lunatics in the Union house'.⁴⁸ Chairman of Bedminster Union was the Rev. G.T. Seymour. He was an unbeneficed clergyman, educated at Eton and both Oxford and Cambridge, a magistrate and owner of land not only in Somerset but also in the Isle of Wight until he sold his estate there to Tennyson. He was far less assiduous as Chairman than William Mirehouse, frequently being absent from the weekly meetings of the Bedminster Guardians which until the workhouse was finished in 1838 were held at the Angel Inn, Long Ashton. In 1839 Seymour was succeeded as Chairman by Colonel Whetham of Abbots Leigh, one of the two Vice Chairmen.

In essence Chairmen of the Guardians were members of local elites often drawn from the *ex officio* magistrates⁴⁹ whom the 1834 Act allowed to be Guardians and this was true of Guardians in even such a working class parish as Bedminster. It was allocated, quite unfairly given that it comprised half the population of the Union, six Guardians out of a total of 34. In addition it had one *ex officio* Guardian, Robert Phippen, a long-serving city councillor and then Alderman who also served as Mayor of Bristol and at his death left £200,000. Of the six Guardians elected in 1838, Thomas Bayton was a brewer at Ashton Gate, Thomas Drake was a tanner and leather factor, John Cox was probably likewise and Thomas Lant Shaw resided at Bedminster Lodge, Parson Street. Almost certainly no employee became a Guardian and it would be not until the 1880s that any women did so in Bristol.⁵⁰ As for the Corporation of the Poor it was dominated by city councillors and church-wardens who were overwhelmingly drawn from Bristol's well-to-do middle class. In the Clifton Union, half the six Guardians elected at mid-century for Clifton parish answered to the same description and it was only among the seven Guardians elected for St Philip and Jacob Without that rather less exalted folk were to be found, such as a baker, a grocer and two maltsters.⁵¹

Establishing the new Poor Law involved recruiting a whole new body of paid staff. Nationally, by 1850, they numbered 12,804 and cost over half a million pounds in salaries.⁵² Finding suitable officers was no easy task for the Guardians. The Bedminster Guardians had trouble with Charles Clark, Master of the workhouse 'for repeated dereliction of his duty'. Evidently he was ill and Mrs Plumly, the Matron, kept things going to the Guardian's satisfaction until a new Master was appointed since they proposed to pay her a gratuity of £5 for so doing. Unfortunately for her the mean-minded Poor Law Commission vetoed this, a telling sign of the loss of local independence brought about by the new law. The Corporation of the Poor's Master of St Peter's, the oft-praised Josias Downing, was not exempt from a common shortcoming

of such officials; he ended his career with defalcations amounting to £455 17s 3d.⁵³ Likewise chaplains and doctors could and did cause trouble. In the same year, 1838, in which a new workhouse Master for Bedminster had to be found, the current Chaplain had to be dispensed with because he was only prepared to provide one full service on a Sunday in the new workhouse while the Guardians insisted on two. At the same time George Beke, a medical officer, had to be reprimanded for failing to attend the workhouse daily and eventually he was requested either to resign or appoint a properly qualified representative. This latter he did only to incur the Guardians' displeasure by 'the great delay in dispensing the medicine when ordered by Mr Smart', the representative whom he had appointed. At last Beke was prevailed upon to resign and Smart was elected in his place. Nor was this the end of troubles over officers. In the same year John Harris and his wife Sarah were appointed Porter (salary £20 p.a.) and Nurse (salary £12 p.a.) for the workhouse, only for them to resign three months later. A month afterwards the Guardians were handing out a severe reprimand to one of the relieving officers 'for neglect of duty'.⁵⁴ This was a serious matter since the success or otherwise of the local administration of the new law depended in no mean degree upon the assiduity of relieving officers. They were the front line troops. Indeed it has been claimed that many of them indeed were ex-soldiers although in reality far too little is known of them for this to be acceptable. In Bedminster their pay - three at £68 p.a. and one at £80 - was more than that of a labourer but was rather below that of a skilled man such as a ship wright so that it is not surprising that they often do not figure in the pages of the Bristol Directories. This was less the case with Overseers and Collectors whom the new poor law virtually reduced to being concerned solely with the mechanics of getting in the poor-rates. Some appear to have enjoyed some status and held the position for many years as was the case with Benjamin Room who served Bedminster as Overseer, as Clerk to St John's Church and assistant Registrar of Births and Deaths for at least thirty-four years. Others were shopkeepers such as Mr Alport, grocer and Overseer for Clifton or Mr Knight, Overseer for St Philip and Jacob who was a coal merchant.⁵⁵

The best paid officer was the Clerk to the Guardians. He was very often a solicitor since he was required to be legal adviser to the Guardians and also to conduct all their correspondence. Bedminster began by paying their Clerk £100 p.a. but two years later they were faced with a motion to increase his salary by £25. This was rejected but a proposal to rescind their 1836 ruling that he should not sell his services elsewhere was carried. No doubt freedom to engage in private practice

made the post more attractive particularly if it could be combined with the paid office of Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages whose appointment since the Registration Act of 1836 was in the hands of the Guardians. This probably accounts for the long service of some Clerks such as Robert Mercer who served as Clerk to the Clifton Guardians from 1836 to 1870 and as Registrar from 1857 to 1871 while the law firm of Osborne and Ward was annually elected as Clerk to the Corporation of the Poor from 1823 to 1856 when an individual had to be named Clerk in order to conform to the rules of the Poor Law Board.⁵⁶

So what was the upshot of the coming of the new Poor Law in its first thirty or forty years? Certainly a new centrally-driven local administration had been formed and Bristol's historic Corporation of the Poor had had to conform to this. It was usually more business-like, especially in its scrutiny of expenditure, than before the 1834 Act. But it had serious defects, not only as a result of deficiencies in its personnel, but because its design in the case of Bedminster and Clifton Unions was flawed and it made little sense not to extend the Bristol Union to take in the suburbs brought within the city boundaries in 1835. By mid-century there were 'interminable disputes in the Board Room of the Bedminster Union' and so acute was the conflict between the very largely urban parish of Bedminster and the twenty-one rural parishes in the Union that each side referred their case to the Poor Law Board itself. The rural parishes wanted Bedminster to be hived off as a separate Union while the Bedminster Guardians complained that their interests were overridden by the rural Guardians and demanded justice. The Poor Law Board satisfied neither; it simply insisted that Bedminster could not be a separate Union because it did not have that *sine qua non* of a Union, a deterrent workhouse. Likewise in Clifton parish there was a demand for being a separate Union so that responsibilities towards the numerous poor of St Philip and Jacob might be shed. The demand came up against the same objection. Robert Phippen, the Bedminster magistrate and *ex officio* Guardian, was apt to blame Weale, the Assistant Commissioner, who had engineered both Unions in the first place, but the root of the problem was the failure of government and parliament in 1834 to go the whole hog and simply abolish the Local Act Unions. This would have opened the way in Bristol for creating what did not come to pass until 1898, a single Union catering entirely for the urban poor while the rural parishes outside the city addressed their very different problems.

The new Poor Law was cash-driven. Its proponents only regarded it as successful if its advent brought down the rates. This it did to some extent in the three Bristol Unions. Nevertheless, supporting the poor still kept the poor-rate high by comparison with other parts of the country. A

parliamentary return of 1855 showing what each ratepayer had to pay to maintain the poor in fifty of the most populous urban poor law Unions in the country, excluding the metropolis, showed that ratepayers in the old city in Bristol had to pay more than anyone else. The explanation, as Elisha Robinson argued at a meeting of the Corporation of the Poor, was not that the poor were being extravagantly cared for but simply that there were more paupers per thousand of the population in Bristol than elsewhere. At one extreme was Bristol with one in fourteen of the inhabitants of the old city in receipt of relief and at the other was the Union of industrial Ashton under Lyne with only one in seventy on relief.⁵⁷ On the other hand it has to be remembered that Bristol, as a long established city, in spite of its relative decline in the first half of the nineteenth century, had both more charities and a better-off middle class than newly emerging northern industrial towns and this made it rather easier to find the resources to sustain the poor. Mid-century Bristol had the fourth highest rateable value in the country and long-established charitable institutions such as the Bristol Dispensary provided useful maternity and medical services at costs suitable for the less well off.⁵⁸

So, in conclusion, how should the coming of the new Poor Law be judged? For the poor seeking relief it was, in many respects, harsh even though there is no evidence of cruelties being inflicted upon them as was the case at Andover in the 1840s. Nevertheless for the able-bodied pauper the new law offered no relief in his own home and if he entered the workhouse he was obliged to engage in work of a strongly penal flavour: stone breaking, oakum picking and, in Bedminster, bone crushing. As with prison work, poor law work because it was very ill paid and hence its products could offer unfair competition in the marketplace, had to be limited to those very occupations that few if any would seek to follow. Also for all who entered the workhouse the experience was bound to be dreary and quasi-penal otherwise it would not have the deterrent character which the architects of the new law envisaged. No doubt 'the house' provided better shelter from wind and weather and food in greater quantity than was the case in some homes in the numerous ill-kept and filthy courts in early Victorian inner city Bristol but the cost of going into the workhouse was the splitting up of the family - to satisfy the Victorian obsession with separating the sexes - giving up ones clothes and wearing the distinctive shapeless workhouse dress, being forced to obey many petty rules and suffering punishments for infractions and above all enduring the pervasive monotony of workhouse existence. Of course, as in all institutions, the resourceful found ways of defeating the system. But for the elderly, the sick, the handicapped and disabled, those who were unable to survive outside,

workhouse life - at least in the first generation of the house's existence - most often induced overwhelming apathy. For those who sought relief in order to survive outside the house this can only have been possible with some help from relatives and friends since the weekly sums paid out with the approval of relieving officers and Guardians were too small for subsistence and come what may they had to be claimed weekly in person however difficult that might be for the aged or disabled.

In sum, one suspects that few of us would have survived long either on indoor or outdoor relief in the first generation of the new Poor Law.

Notes

- 1 e.g. G. Bush, *Bristol and its Municipal Government* (Bristol 1976) pp16,99.
- 2 *Bristol Times and Mirror* 15 Jan. 1875 reporting on a paper read by the MOH to the Sanitary Conference at Birmingham.
- 3 E.E. Butcher, *Bristol Corporation of the Poor 1696-1898*.
- 4 *Bristol Mercury* 2 May 1835 provides material on Manchee who was the paper's editor as well as Deputy Governor; for his role in the Corporation of the Poor and his failed campaign to land himself a salary of £400 see T.J. Manchee, *Causes of the present alarming amount of the Poor Rates in the city of Bristol* (Bristol 1834). The home which Manchee was using as a test seems to have been a building known as the Armoury in Stapleton parish well outside Bristol at this time.
- 5 *Parliamentary Papers* (hereafter PP) 1834 vol. xxviii *Appendix to the first report from the Commissioners on the Poor Laws* report of Captain Chapman.
- 6 For the ruling see *Bristol Mercury* 12 March 1836.
- 7 At mid-century 1,683 of Clifton's 3,072 tenements were valued at £20 or over whereas only 220 of St Philip and Jacob's 5,352 were so valued (see PP 1857-8 pt. 1 vol. xlix *Return from Parishes in Lancashire, Suffolk, Hampshire and Gloucestershire of the number of Tenements assessed to rate for the relief of the poor* pp293 ff.
- 8 PP 1836 vol. xxix Pt. 1 *Second Report of the Poor Law Commission* Appendix p523.
- 9 Somerset Record Office BD/Ba/2-9 *Minutes of Bedminster Union Board of Guardians* (hereafter *Bedminster Minutes*) 2 Jan. 27 Feb. 1838.
- 10 When this was bought in 1837 it became known as Stapleton workhouse until 1918 when it became Stapleton Institution catering for those with learning difficulties. In 1948 it became an NHS hospital and in 1959 it was renamed Manor Park Hospital when it specialized in the care of the elderly. At the time of writing it has acquired a new name, Blackberry Hill Hospital.
- 11 See note 5, Captain Chapman's report pp510-513.
- 12 D. Cole *The work of Sir Gilbert Scott* (1981) p8. Cole's extensive list of Scott's works does not include Bedminster. For the contract see Bristol Central Library (hereafter BCL) B22063 *Articles of agreement concerning a workhouse at Long Ashton*.
- 13 PP 1840 vol. xxi *5th Annual Report of the Poor Law Commission* Appendix D pp116-118.
- 14 See note 5, Rev. H. Bishop's report p888.
- 15 See note 5, Captain Chapman's report p513.
- 16 PP 1837 vol. xxxi *3rd Annual Report of the Poor Law Commission* pp123-125 where under 'Workhouses ordered to be altered or enlarged' Clifton was authorized to spend £4,500 on this.
- 17 *Bristol Mercury* 5, 12, 26 Oct. 1844; PP 1845 vol. xxvii *11th Report of the Poor Law Commission* Appendices p117 and PP 1849 vol. xxv *1st Report of the Poor Law Board* Appendix B p65.
- 18 M.A. Crowther, *The workhouse system 1834-1929* chap. 5 for details of Masters' salaries.
- 19 PP 1843 vol. xxi *9th Report of the Poor Law Commission* pp12-13 and Appendix A pp82-108 for Weale's report.
- 20 M.A. Crowther, *op. cit.* p29.

- 21 For example four youngsters were given a month's hard labour at Shepton Mallet gaol for refusing to do prescribed work at Keynsham Union workhouse; see *Bristol Mercury* 10 April 1847.
- 22 Until 1847 this was the Poor Law Commission which was succeeded in 1871 by the Poor Law Board which in turn was subsumed in the Local Government Board.
- 23 7 & 8 Vict. 101 created the District Auditors. Bristol, Clifton and Bedminster were in Somerset and Wiltshire whose Auditor was Alfred Whitaker of Frome. For the conflict see PP 1846 vol. xix, 1847 vol. xxviii, 1847-8 vol. xxxiii *12th-14th Reports of the Poor Law Commission*.
- 24 *Bristol Mercury* 13 Dec. 1856.
- 25 *Bristol Mercury* 4 April 1857.
- 26 This complicated history can be traced in Bristol Record Office (hereafter BRO) 31038 vols. 1 & 2 *Visitor's reports on St Peter's 1846-1860*; PP *Annual Reports of the Commissioners in Lunacy* especially reports 8-13; the *Proceedings of the Council and Minute book of the Committee for the new Asylum* both in BRO.
- 27 PP 1861 vol. xxvii *15th Annual Report of the Commissioners in Lunacy* p124.
- 28 PP 1856 vol. xlix *Copy of the correspondence between the Poor Law Board and the Guardians of the Poor for the city of Bristol on the subject of the death of Eliza Canningford*.
- 29 BRO 38537 (5).
- 30 In 1867 the President of the Poor Law Board declared that the sick were 'not the proper objects' of a Workhouse management which must, to a greater extent, be of a deterrent character (quoted in S & B Webb *English Poor Law History Part II The last hundred years* vol. I p319).
- 31 For the report see PP 1864 vol. xxviii p167 ff and especially pp470, 514 and 520.
- 32 D. Large and F. Round *Public Health in mid-Victorian Bristol* (Bristol 1974 - in this series) pp14-15.
- 33 M.A. Crowther *op. cit.* pp156-167.
- 34 *Bedminster Minutes* 9 Jan. 27 Feb. 1838.
- 35 M. Pelling *Cholera, Fever, and English medicine 1825-1865* p265; *Bristol Mercury* 6 Nov. 1847.
- 36 See chap. xi of F.P. Cobbe's autobiography.
- 37 BRO 11169(1) *Programme of Opening Ceremony etc of Southmead* 18 Sept. 1902.
- 38 *Bristol Mercury* 16 Oct. 1847.
- 39 PP 1873 vol. xxix *2nd Report of the Local Government Board* Appendix D pp270-1.
- 40 PP 1836 vol. xxix Pt. 1 *2nd Report of the Poor Law Commission* p7.
- 41 PP 1841 vol. xxi *Return of Unions to which an Order has been issued prohibiting Outdoor Relief to able-bodied paupers* includes both Clifton and Bedminster but not Bristol. Bedminster received the order in 1838; see *Bedminster Minutes* 29 Sept. 1838.
- 42 This memorandum is reprinted as Appendix A of S & B Webb *English Poor Law Policy* (1910).
- 43 Permanents ranged in numbers from 1,404 to 869 and casuals from 486 to 162 with bastardy ranging from 121 to 8 and working from 418 to 65. All these figures were average weekly numbers during a given year within the ten year period of 1833-1842. The authorities believed that the figures needed multiplying by three to provide an approximate estimate of the numbers of Bristolians actually being relieved.

- 44 For the Bedminster list see BRO 35823.
- 45 For the details, D. Large, *The Irish in Bristol in 1851* in R. Swift and S. Gilley eds. *The Irish in the Victorian City* (1985).
- 46 See BRO 12168 (28) St Peter's Hospital Letterbook 1837-1842 for 31 letters of this kind.
- 47 For these two lists, see BRO 39875.
- 48 D. Cooper *A sermon preached at Fishponds on April 3 on the occasion of the death of W.S. Mirehouse*; see BCL 1040 for two pamphlets by Mirehouse defending the Clergy Society - which sought to succour widows and female orphans of the clergy - against criticism from the Dean of Bristol. For his Welsh origin and details of his family's connection with Hambrook see C.H.B. Elliott *Winterbourne, Gloucestershire* (Bristol 1936)
- 49 As were Mirehouse and Seymour. One out of every two Governors of the Corporation of the Poor held the office of Mayor of Bristol.
- 50 P.F. Aschrott *The English Poor Law System* (1902) p221.
- 51 For their names and occupations *Bristol Mercury* 16 April 1953 and *Matthews Bristol Directory* (1852).
- 52 PP 1851 vol. xxvi *3rd Annual Report of the Poor Law Board* Appendix p156.
- 53 *Bristol Mercury* 19 April 1856.
- 54 *Bedminster Minutes* 6, 20, 27 Feb., 3, 17 April, 17 July, 11, 18 Sept., 13, 20 Nov., 24 Dec. 1838.
- 55 PP 1852 vol. xxxiv *Memorials from Bedminster Guardians to the Poor Law Board* p490; *Bristol Mercury* 1 April 1848 for the Clifton Overseers.
- 56 For comprehensive descriptions of the duties of Clerks and Relieving Officers see P.F. Aschrott *op. cit.* pp222-226.
- 57 PP 1856 vol. xlix *Amount expended for the relief of the poor in 1854 and 1855 with the cost per head on the population in 50 Unions having the largest population in England and Wales* p343; *Bristol Mercury* 19 July, 16 Aug 1856.
- 58 PP 1852 vol. xlv *Amount of Property Assessed to the relief of the poor* p34; *Bristol Mercury* 30 Dec. 1837 where it is reported that in the past sixty-two years it had treated 84,887 patients.

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